

TITLE: Effectiveness of Street Outreach in Louisiana: Individual or Community-level Intervention?

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BACKGROUND: Twenty community-based organizations (CBOs) are funded in Louisiana to provide street outreach to persons at risk for HIV infection. The effectiveness of this intervention outside of planned research trials is unknown.

METHODS: CBOs funded for HIV prevention in Louisiana collect self-administered surveys at outreach sites quarterly. Surveys are collected systematically using a standard protocol and a brief self-administered questionnaire. In 1998, CBOs in six regions also conducted surveys at control sites in demographically similar neighborhoods, which had no street, outreach programs. This analysis compares data from control and intervention sites collected during second quarter 1998.

RESULTS: Surveys were collected from 831 persons in control sites and 1,502 persons in intervention sites. The distribution of age, the percentage of persons with multiple sex partners and the percentage that used drugs were similar in the intervention and control areas. However, persons in control areas were significantly more likely to be male (60% vs. 49%; $p<0.001$), African-American (91% vs. 88%; $p<0.05$) and heterosexual (91% vs. 80%; $p<0.001$). Fifty-eight percent of persons in intervention areas compared to 6% of persons in control areas used condoms the last time they had sex ($p<0.001$). Persons in intervention areas were significantly more likely to know where to get free condoms (85% vs. 73%, $p<0.001$) and use a free or low cost brand (72% vs. 65%, $p<0.01$). Although control areas had no documented outreach program, 33% of persons from control sites reported contact with an outreach worker in the last 6 months. In control sites, 57% of persons who had contact with an outreach worker used a condom, compared to 46% of persons who had no contact ($p<0.01$). In intervention sites, 62% of persons who had contact with an outreach worker used a condom, compared to 50% who had no contact ($p<0.001$). In a multivariate analysis limited to persons with 2 or more sex partners (controlling for gender, race, age, sexual orientation, drug use and region), persons who had contact with an outreach worker were 40% more likely to use condoms (OR: 1.4, 95% C.I.: 1.1-1.9); however, persons from intervention and control sites were similar with respect to condom use (OR: 1.1, 95% C.I.: 0.8-1.4).

CONCLUSION: This evaluation suggests that street outreach as currently practiced in routine HIV prevention programs is successful in increasing condom use among high-risk persons. However, the effect appears to be seen only in persons who have had contact with outreach workers, suggesting that street outreach may be an effective individual-level intervention but may not be disseminated as a community-level intervention.

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